

RURAL TOURISM: EXPERIENCES FROM AUSTRIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JAPAN

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【Abstract】

This presentation explains what is considered as rural tourism. Austria is a special place for successful rural tourism and tourism is essential for the national income. In Japan rural tourism does not play this important role yet. The presentation is divided into two parts: (1) analyzing the situation in Austria with an outlook for future development and (2) a comparative assessment of rural tourism in Austria and Japan. While rural tourism is mature in Austria it is yet to realize its full potential in Japan. The means earned in tourism are a most important source to preserve the traditional cultural landscapes in both countries.

Key words : rural tourism, rural economy, landscape preservation, regional change

Rural Tourism in Austria

I propose a definition of rural tourism that simply considers all non urban tourism as rural. Tourism, according to an old Austrian folk understanding, refers to a non-business trip with at least four overnight stays. I simplify this rule further by using the term tourism if someone consumes merely one overnight stay. Non urban attractions and activities like mountains and plains with summer and winter sports contribute to rural tourism which is highly diverse. More than 80% of Austrian national tourism is rural tourism. In Table 1, I divide rural tourism into three major altitude zones, which share common characteristics. In the lowest and most populated zones of Austria, we find all urban tourism and some places with rural tourism like the plains around the river Danube and Lake Neusiedl only profitable for summer tourism. The area is also widely used as recreational area for urban centres with their surroundings and the extent of rural tourism with overnight stays remains limited. All major industries and the most fertile zones of Austrian agriculture are within this altitude range and tourism is not the best economic

alternative for most people. With 56% of the population and 25% of the land area, the population density is 210 people per km².

The intermediate altitude zone, where populations reside between 401m and 800m altitude, covers 30% of the Austrian territory and most rural tourism occurs here. With 38% of the population this region is less populated - 117 people per km², so tourism became the lead economy after the gradual decrease in agricultural production mainly during the 70s and 80s. From viewpoint of winter tourism this range may be endangered as an expected warming could seriously challenge the possibilities for winter tourism (Breiling et al., 1999) with consequential threats to the entire economic structure of this zone. Many small scales tourist companies developed here with a limited degree of specialization. Private renting of rooms, flats and houses is most common in this zone. As most of the tourists come from Germany and Austria, English and other foreign languages were not usually required. A licence for tourism is required if someone has more than 20 tourist beds. Tourism can have a special family atmosphere in more simple accommodations with modest prices.

Table 1: Rural Tourism according to population in altitude Zones of Austria

Altitude in meter a. s. l.	Inhabitants	Area in km ²	% of Austrian population	% of Austrian land area	Rural tourism
117 - 400	4,366,101	21000	56	25	Some places
401 - 800	2,959,769	25200	38	30	Most places
801 - 1780	469,916	37800	6	45	Most profitable

Source: ÖSTAT Austrian Census 1991, cited in Breiling et al. 1997, p.11

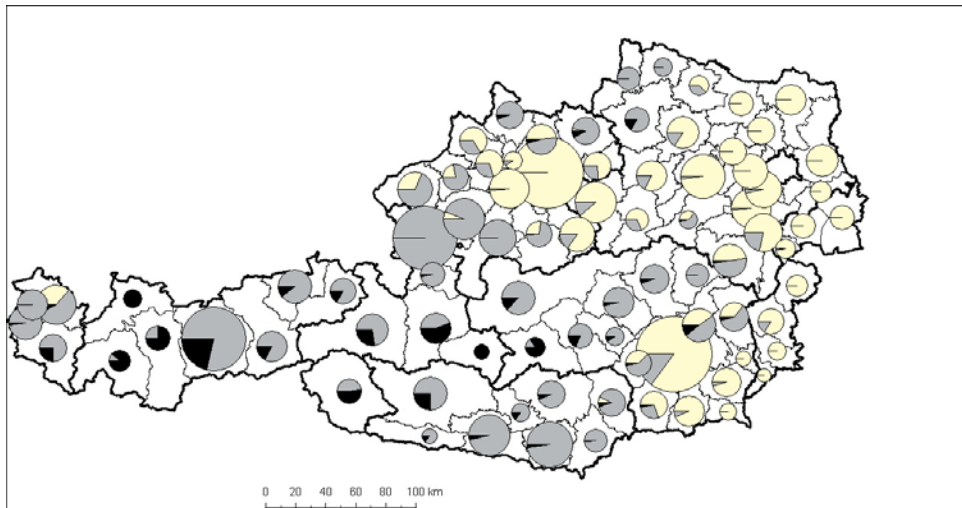
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The highest altitude zone with 6% of Austrian population living over 800m altitude and an area of 45 % - only 12 persons per km² - is privileged. An early concentration on tourism already at the beginning of the 20th century gave a comparative advantage to regions lower down established and built out in the 70s and 80s. The original farmers had specialized long before in tourism. The productivity of agriculture in high zones was always modest and farmers in this area were forced to look for alternatives long before their colleagues in lower elevations did so. Therefore these people today have several generations of experience and are the most professional in selling tourism. Particularly in winter these zones have a climatic advantage as they are better off than warmer regions lower down with snow conditions for the practice of winter sports usually far better. Most traditional and prestigious resorts belong to this zone. The top resorts are internationally known and employees speak many languages.

In Figure 1 we see Austrian districts and coloured circles.

The size of each circle indicates the number of inhabitants. The colour indicates the share in each altitude range described above. White means low altitudes up to 400m, grey the range from 400m to 800m and black is over 800m altitude.

Overnight stays of foreign guests are used as an indicator for the intensity of tourism. Out of 114 million guest nights in 2000, some 100 million are rural overnight stays. Winter tourism is associated with downhill skiing, cross country skiing, skating, and sledging and these activities are major attractions, helping to generate substantial income during winter time. If climate conditions are suitable this kind of tourism has probably the highest growth potential. Some 50 million guest nights of Austrian rural tourism are due to winter tourism during November and April (nowadays the same as guest nights in summer that cover the period May to October). One winter guest night gives higher earnings than a summer guest night. The details of the annual distribution in classes of accommodation are specified in Table 2.



Source: Breiling et al. (1997) based on detailed data of Table 1

Figure 1: Map of Austrian districts, size of population, and shares in altitude classes

Table 2: Overnight stays in Austria and kind of accommodation in 2000

Kind of accommodation	Overnight Stays Austria 2000	Share of Total
Hotels	71.648.851	63,02%
Commercial holiday houses or flats	5.277.221	4,64%
Public Health Care	1.741.188	1,53%
Private Health Care	1.363.098	1,20%
Children Youth Recreation & Health Care	2.262.600	1,99%
Youth Hostels	1.157.127	1,02%
Mountain Cottages	528.477	0,46%
Other Accommodations	2.129.056	1,87%
Camping	4.603.008	4,05%
Private accommodations non farms	7.525.915	6,62%
Private accommodations farms	3.177.178	2,79%
Privately rented holiday houses or flats	12.272.771	10,80%
Total	113.686.490	100,00%

Source: Statistik Austria, 2001

Tourist hotels are most important for Austrian overnight stays. About 63% of guest nights are spent in hotels, 28% in top categories with five and four stars, 23% in three star hotels and 12% in two or one star hotels. With regard to rural tourism the share of hotel nights is less, perhaps 55% as urban tourism almost entirely depends on this category of accommodation.

One quarter of overnight stays belongs to the category rented houses, flats and private accommodation. About 15% of all guest nights are consumed in rented houses or flats. Two thirds of them are privately rented out and one third is commercially rented out. Another 10% of all guest nights occur in private accommodations, 3% of them in farm houses and 7% in other private accommodation. More than 15,000 farms, one out of 14, offer farm tourism. On average each farm has 13 beds to rent out. Some 200,000 beds, one sixth of total Austrian capacity, are at disposal on farms but 3.2 million guest nights indicate a low usage.

Austrian "spas", similar to "onsen" in Japan, are primarily important for the category of health care and contribute up to 3% of Austrian bed nights. Many spas are situated in lower altitudes. Another 3% are youth hostels and other cheap accommodation. The final 6% are modest accommodations on camping grounds or high alpine cottages.

Seasonality: summer and winter tourism

Figure 2 explains the growth of tourism according to summer and winter tourism from 1951 up to 2004. The peak of Austrian tourism was reached in early 90s with 130 million guest nights and has been gradually decreasing to 114 million presently. Summer tourism has been decreas-

ing since the 90s and winter tourism has slightly increased during the same 54 year period. As result of these trends summer and winter tourist nights are now approximately the same.

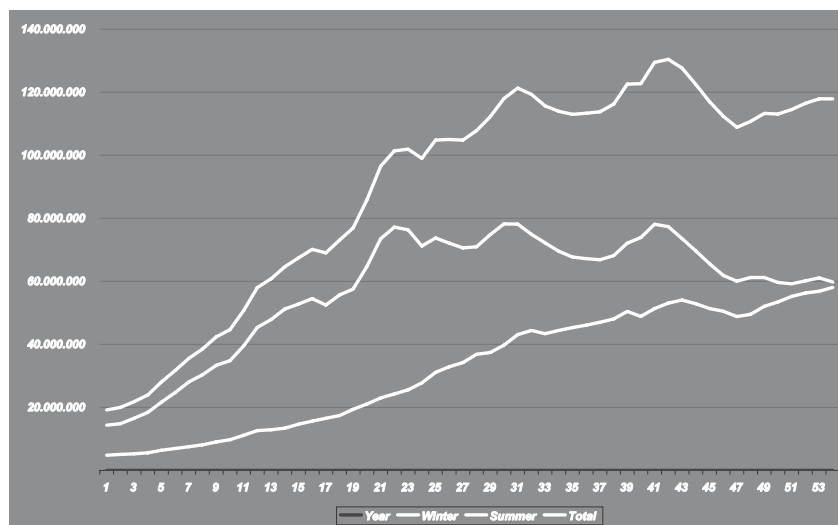
(Statistik Austria, 2005)

Some 6.4 % of GDP were directly earned by tourism in 2005 (Statistik Austria, 2005a), less than in the beginning of the 90s with some 8% of GDP earned by tourism. In contrast to Japan, Austria earns six times more of its total income in rural areas. This is a combination of the earnings in primary land uses and tourism. Rural areas in Austria are sufficiently rich in comparison to its equivalent in Japan.

Special & Non Special Rural Tourism

Places like Lech or Kitzbühel are well known examples of exclusive tourism resorts and comparatively more expensive. Sights like "Großglockner Hochalpen Straße", which is open from June to September or other high Alpine pass roads are easily accessible and represent major attractions. Large travel agencies promote rural tourism only for particular places or sights. These locations have relative large capacities and similar hotel structures like urban tourism. In this case there is also a market for travel agents, not usually the case for smaller locations. In these examples I speak about special rural tourism organized by professionals of tourism.

Non special rural tourism is small scale tourism that can be found practically everywhere in Austria. This kind of tourism is inexpensive and directly sold between the owners of facilities and customers. Traditionally the consumers of rural tourism are self organized. Personal communica-



Source: Tourism in Austria, 2005

Figure 2: Development of Austrian tourism according to summer (medium line), winter (lower line) and annual (upper line)

tions and recommendations promote single places and sometimes special websites offer possibilities to book vacations for their members online. Often tourists frequent the same resort every year with a stable relation between locals and tourists. It is not a single attraction but the general and varied features of a landscape that count here - a mix of mountains, forests, meadows, creeks or lakes for example. Tourists can enjoy activities like hiking, mountain climbing, swimming in Alpine lakes and more, but it is not important to stay in place A or B of the region. Non special rural tourism is organized by non-professionals of tourism.

Historically all rural tourism started as non special rural tourism to support agriculture. The growth in this kind of tourism helped to compensate for the losses in agriculture. Today tourism gives more than 3 times the income of agriculture. The provision of cultural landscape is a key product for tourism and was for a long time free of charge. However, the marginalization of agricultural land becomes increasingly a problem in more remote locations of Austria. It can be expected that non special rural tourism will become less important than today. Less income and higher disparities to rural and urban centres lead to an extra loss of population and less care for landscape management. The scattered structure of rural tourism disappears.

Intensive forms of rural tourism

Skiing and snow based tourism

Skiing and snow based tourism almost entirely coincides with winter tourism if we disregard glacier ski resorts that may run even in summer. Winter tourism contributed with 59.2 million guest nights more than 6.9 billion € in income or 116 € per unit in the season 2004/05.



Source: Kaprun glacier, Salzburg, October 2004, own photo

Figure 3: *Skiing is the most intensive form of rural tourism in winter*

Tourists need particular equipment such as skis, boots, or thermal clothes for examples. A modern ski resort requires sophisticated infrastructure with ski lifts and snow making facilities. There are some 3,500 ski lifts with some 5,610 small lift equivalents in Austria (Peck 2006). Currently we find 23,000 ha of downhill ski course area. This is 0.25% of the total Austrian land area. Some 9,000 ha are equipped with snow making facilities.

The requirement for investment is high, with reported 0.3 billion Euro annually (Buchgeher 2003) alone for additional artificial snow making equipment and expansion of lift capacities. This number showed an increase during the last few years. Still another 1.5 billion € are required to complete the installation of artificial snow making equipment for the remainder of the ski lift area.

The cost of energy and water to produce artificial snow is about 3 € per m³. Depending on the weather condition the running cost of artificial snow making varies. Assuming some 0.3 m³ artificial snow per m² and season, we may need up to another 0.1 billion for running the facilities. Furthermore, machines to prepare the downhill tracks and landscape restoration measures are also required. Investing in modernisation of the existing hotels is another venture of a similar magnitude.

Due to the requirements of investment, snow dependent tourist companies in particular have substantial loans and are more vulnerable to additional changes and pressures. Profits are shrinking despite the increasing number of tourists. Inevitably some tourist companies will close in the coming years. Nevertheless, it is an encouraging economic sign that rural areas can mobilize such high investments and remain for the time being competitive to life styles in urban areas.

Swimming & Spas and Mountains

Swimming is exclusively a summer tourism activity. Depending on the weather it is enjoyed between the months of May and September. Spa tourism as a primarily indoor activity is not necessarily a summer activity and therefore equally distributed over the year. Walking and climbing in mountains is a major summer activity. However, the peak of summer tourism in rural Austria is over. After a rapid increase in guest nights from 20 million in the 1950s to almost 80 million in the 1970s, this level remained stable until the 1990s and is now stabilizing at around 60 million guest nights a year (see also Figure 2). In summer 2005 there were 59.6 million guest nights creating a value of 6.3 billion €.



Source: Nassfeld, Carinthia, August 2004, own photo.

Figure 4: *Farm tourism, an extensive form of rural tourism in Austria*

Activities of summer tourism occur in more countries and areas than the activities of winter tourism. Many competing destinations developed, not only in Europe, but elsewhere in the world due to the availability of cheap air tickets. Improvements and specialization in summer tourism is primarily necessary to keep a dominant position for Austrian rural tourism in Europe, but the loss in shares is likely to continue.

Health and wellness in spas is a popular attraction. This is increasingly an indoor activity segment and very attractive for older persons and popular throughout the year. Another important form of intensive tourism, also viable in summer and winter, is event tourism - with major shows of well known stars or sports competition - which attracts many people. The relative share of event tourism is higher in urban areas, but major rural tourist resorts organize smaller and medium sized events.

Hiking and outdoor recreation are most important for summer tourism. This also includes swimming and water sports, mountain climbing, bicycling or mountain biking. In general, all these pleasures can be found in landscapes around inland waters, lakes, rivers and in the mountains. In general, activities do not change too much over the year, but sport equipment does become more sophisticated and expensive. Requirements in accommodation are also rising. High class accommodations are increasing while lower class accommodations, in particular private rooms and rented flats, are decreasing.

Extensive forms of rural tourism

Farm tourism

Farms were the origin of all rural tourism. Without tourism rural areas in Austria would be far more scarcely

populated and without farmers there would be no rural tourism. However, when farmers become successful with tourism they usually no longer worked as farmers but tourist managers instead. The rural population in Austria, therefore, is a mixed farming and service providing society and understanding of the fruitful synergies in these two businesses is widely understood. The phrase 'farm tourism' tends to describes newcomers in the tourist business and non special rural tourism or in-transition farming to tourism businesses. The main income is still agriculture.

In 1999 some 15,500 out of 215,000 Austrian farms offered tourism on farms. As indicated in Table 2, 2.8% of total guest nights are spent on farms. With almost 200,000 tourist beds some 15% of the tourist capacity is on farms. There is under- usage of these beds with total occupancy on 16 days on average. Perhaps the actual usage is higher due to private use or with unregistered tourists. Prices of overnight stays are cheap, perhaps € 30 for bed and breakfast, sometimes even less. With the average of 200 overnight stays a farm can get an extra income of € 6,000, with an exceptional performance of 1000 overnight stays a year, the turnover would be € 30,000. The farms use their own products wherever possible as well as family labour force. Expenditures remain limited. Offering extra services and specialities can increase the profit by up to 25%. Therefore the marketing of farm tourism in Austria displays a number of diverse profiles in farm tourism.

In the main organization of farm tourism called "Urlaub am Bauernhof - farmholidays" promoted by the website www.farmholidays.com some 40% of farms offering farm tourism are collected together. Seven profiles are offered: a) organic farming with cuisine from organic products, b) wellness and health on farms, c) care for babies and small children, d) care for disabled persons, e) riding farms, f) cyclist farms and g) wine farms (Österreichwerbung 2001). While the organic farming, wine and riding profiles are typical by-products of the agricultural production, the health, care and sport profiles are new niches, product lines that farms can provide because of their settings within natural and quiet environs. The organisation develops common guidelines for each profile and checks if criteria are satisfactorily met. The compliance of member farms is assessed by two experts. If successful, the farmers gradually develop further conformity to the profile selection.

Concepts of ecotourism and soft tourism (sanfter Tourismus)

Recently, eco-tourism has become a popular term,

describing environmentally friendly tourism and should increasingly become a special niche within rural tourism of Austria (BMWA 2004). About 19 % of the Austrian area is devoted to nature protection in the form of national parks or wild life reserves, NATURA 2000 areas, or other kind of landscape and nature reserves covering all altitude zones.

There are several indicators that can serve as criteria to qualify for eco-tourism: density of organic farms; variety of regional foodstuffs (as a special trade option); number of educational facilities such as museums; the number of local AGENDA 21 processes; number of communities participating in municipal climate protection programs; opportunities for environmentally friendly transportation; and the number of thematic paths and educative events to all these events or processes. In many respects there is both overlap and complementarities between eco-tourism and farm tourism. Eco-tourism serves the needs of more mobile tourists without small children or disabled people. Farm tourism is better suited to families with small children, as well as handicapped groups and aged people.

Eco-tourism replaced the 1980's concept of "soft tourism", a concept that became well known from Virgental in Eastern Tyrol. This remote valley was more difficult to access and kept simpler than major tourist locations like Kitzbühel or Zell am See. The idea was, that sellers in contrast to other regions do not develop "hard" tourist infrastructures (e.g. for skiing), but "soft" (i.e. undeveloped) with a limited, low level degree of technology and infrastructure in expectation that tourists will appreciate this more 'naturalized' setting and want to pay for it. Locals, many who frequently desired instead a more conventional and profitable tourist development did generally not accept the concept. Tourists, on the other hand, often liked an occasional change from the highly intensive tourism experiences they often encountered to more contrasting quiet locations. Similar to farm tourism, eco tourism complements more intensive forms of rural tourism.

Is Austrian rural tourism sustainable?

Austrian rural tourism has more than 100 million guest nights a year; more than 10 billion € are spent for rural tourism in Austria. Due to these developments, the rural population stayed in place, the traditional landscape was maintained and disparities with urban incomes were kept to a minimum. However, with rising economic growth it becomes more difficult to cope with the situation. Investments in tourism climb higher, the level of

technology use increases, and only the wealthier areas have the means to adapt to the ever accelerating changes from outside. The best chances for secure incomes derive from the large, specialized, first class resorts with international reputations. Most of them are in the higher altitudes. Second and third class resorts may encounter troubles with current numbers in rural tourism unlikely to be sustained.

Where higher investments are impossible due to a low population density combined with a late development of tourism we still find opportunities for the more extensive forms of rural tourism like farm tourism and eco tourism. More focus on particular qualities of the local settings for more specialised forms of tourism are required as the competition for tourists is today considerably larger than 20 or 30 years ago. The best chances to obtain higher profits come from the more accessible rural areas for clients from urban centres nearby. The extensive forms of tourism are complementary to the intensive kinds of tourism and they support the total rural tourism in Austria.

Global changes, particularly global warming, could have serious consequences for winter tourism. Most of winter resorts have adapted or are planning to adapt to global warming by establishing artificial snow making facilities (Peck 2006). This could be problematic for two reasons: first, the costs of the adaptations are too high in relation to the possible income so tourist companies encounter serious trouble as they pay back loans with inadequate income; second, the pace and magnitude of global warming are not known and adaptations made today might be inadequate tomorrow (Breiling, Charamza 1999). Some small winter tourist resorts like Unterberg in the neighbourhood of Vienna are relatively low altitude and do very well with moderate investments as they can react in a flexible way to weather conditions. People from Vienna will come if conditions are good. Other resorts are exclusive winter tourist resorts and dependent on international tourists and are more sensitive to climate even if they are higher up and have better conditions for skiing and winter sports. The investments into climate adaptation can be beneficial for the economy of larger regions.

The level of maintenance of the agricultural land decreases without appropriate support from the tourist sector or without major programs from the European Union such as Agenda 2000. Rural tourism will concentrate on those areas that are rich enough to manage their landscape in a traditional way. Previously, the enjoyment of a physical landscape was free of charge but nowadays it costs. Other

areas are likely to lose their variety of landscape. The open Alpine meadows will be covered by other vegetation if animals are no longer using them. In steep areas, damage to the top soil layers are at particular risk. High grass covered by snow and ice can be a reason for such damages. Soil erosion will be the consequence. Within a few years, the landscape will appear less attractive, will be less accessible for tourists, and tourism will rapidly decrease. There are losses in tourism. Shrinkages of tourism must be expected due to fewer members in both, intensive and extensive categories of rural tourism. Requirements for successful tourism get harder, not all the people can or want to fill them. Similar to agriculture selling tourism does not appeal too attractive for successors. In 2005 the number of tourist companies was 1.6% less to the year before (ÖSTAT 2005) - a trend going on for many years was continued. Larger areas were more frequented in the past like the Carinthian Lakes region.

The concentration of rural tourism is anticipated to happen near the most wealthy tourist resorts and near major urban centres. The speed and level of consolidation are unknown. With good economic circumstances in Austria and neighbouring countries the level of consolidation should stop at a rather high level, slightly under what we have today. In any scenario of economic crisis, the losses of rural tourism will be much higher.

Differences and Similarities of Rural Tourism in Austria and Japan

The development of rural tourism in Japan is different from that of Austria. The relation to tourism and agriculture was never too strong. Farms are considerable smaller in scale than in Austria, roughly one ha on mainland Japan as compared to 25 ha in Austria. Extra space to host tourists within the own property is not available. However, hotels and farms are working together, and examples can be found in Awaji, where the Westin or other hotels sell onions and other farm products. Only Sapporo has larger farms similar to Austria where a similar development could happen. There is no easily available information in the field of Japanese tourism so far less data is available to evaluate the Japanese situation.

The non special rural tourism is seldom found in Japan. The difference between rural and urban life styles is larger. There is less vacation time both for employees and students and less availability for travel in Japan. Costs to participate in tourism are higher in Japan. As the economy is robust and time is a very limiting factor, higher priced,

more prestigious hotels are favoured over private accommodations.

A comparison about circumstances is depicted in Table 3. The most important difference is the large coastline in Japan stretching on 33,000 km on 7,000 islands, while Austria is landlocked without sea and the lowest altitude starts at 117m going up to 3797m. In Japan we start from sea level or 0m to 3776m. While 44% of Austrian population lives above 400m altitude (compare Table 1), this share is not so high in Japan. A rough estimate would put less than 5% of Japanese living over this mark. The average altitude of all Japanese territory is 350m above sea level. In Austria this value is 950m above sea level.

Austria is less than a quarter of the size of Japan. Both countries are covered with forest. Austria has 51.4% forest (45.2 productive and 6.2 unproductive) and Japan has 64% forest. There are 16.3% arable land in Austria and 12.7 in Japan. The most distinct differentiation is the number of meadows and pastures, accounting for 21% in Austria and only 0.9% in Japan. The high share of meadows, indicating life stock agriculture brings a lot of diversity into the landscape. In contrast to these settings, forests, in particular coniferous forests, make the landscape dark and this can be perceived as less attractive to tourists.

During my own experiences with hiking in rural Japan and Austria I got the impression that Japanese territory is much less used by walking tourists. The physical inclination of most slopes are steeper in Japan than Austria and without the high percentage of forest, there would be much more erosion area in Japanese landscapes. The low tourist usage in the everyday rural landscape can favour wildlife, which is less disturbed by tourism than in Austria.

Despite remarkable differences in landscape, the income levels are similar in Austria and Japan. Urban people in Japan seem on average to have more income than their Austrian fellows, while rural Austria is economically better off than rural Japan. Both countries have one of the highest life expectancy, but the average Japanese person lives more than two years longer than an Austrian.

From the viewpoint of tourism a varied landscape is commonly desired. Like Austria, Japan provides remarkable landscapes for this purpose. However, the aging of rural society endangers this variety. Many orchards and paddy fields are abandoned today. The situation is likely worsened in the next two decades. The last two generations of Japanese people often have roots on the country side. Urbanisation, with the accompanying rural decline, happened

Table 3: *A selection of basic comparative features between Austria and Japan*

Comparison	Austria	Japan
Population in million	8.2	127
Life expectancy (CIA Fact book 2005)	78.9	81.2
Life expectancy female	82.0	84.6
Life expectancy male	76.0	77.9
Area in km ²	84,000	378,000
Mean altitude of country	950m	350m
GDP (CIA Fact book 2005)	\$255.9 billion (2004 est.)	\$3.745 trillion (2004 est.)
Income per capita (CIA Factbook 2005)	\$31,300	\$29,400
Value of agriculture in % of GDP	2.0 (2000, Table 15.1 and 15.5, Austrian Statistical Yearbook, 2005)	1.3 (2002, Table 3-8, Japan Statistical Yearbook 2005)
Value of tourism in % of GDP	6 (2004 est.)	0.6 (2005 est.)
% arable land (2001)	16.3	12.7
% meadows (2001)	21.0	0.9
% forest (2001)	51.4 (including unproductive forest)	64.4
Mean temperature capitals	11.7 (2000)	15.9 (average 1970-2000)
Annual precipitation capitals	536 (2000)	1467 (average 1970-2000)
Farms or farm households	215,224 (1999, Table 17-1, Austrian Statistical Yearbook, 2005)	2,205,000 (2003, Table 7-1, Japan Statistical Yearbook 2005)

Sources: Statistical Yearbooks of Austria and Japan 2005, World Factbook CIA 2005

during the last 50 years.

An indication of the intensity of tourism is the number of arrivals. In 2005 6.7 million people arrived in Japan from abroad and 17.4 million Japanese travelled to abroad (JNTO 2006). Taking another number from the sales of tourist packages of major travel agents (Statistics Bureau 2004), we find that the major sellers of vacations have for every international deal two local trips. For every 17.4 million foreign holidays we have perhaps 35 million domestic tourist packages.

We can expect at least 40 million arrivals in Japan and perhaps every 7th arrival or max 14% is from abroad. This number does not include domestic trips to see families or business trips. For many Japanese, there is little or no time left to visit other regions. In Austria, the number of arrivals is 26 millions and 18 million of these, or slightly less than 70%, is from abroad. No number of overnight stays is provided in the case of Japan, the overnight stays would account for 160 million, if we would assume four, a number a little less than the Austrian one. The direct comparison Austria - Japan indicates a low use for rural tourism in Japan. Yet based on population numbers alone the local tourism should be 10 times higher. Tourism as a contemporary form of rural land use is underdeveloped in Japan (or overdeveloped in Austria).

The tourist season in Japan is relatively short and concentrates on New Year, golden week at the beginning of may and summer school holidays from mid July to end of

August. Within this season there is a summer peak at "Obon", August 13th to 15th. Transportation is expensive and a hindrance for frequent changes between urban with rural travel. Train trips are convenient but expensive; car trips are cheaper but take longer time with peak season traffic jams usual. The length of journey time is relatively short in Japan but even rural tourism has relative high prices of € 60 or Yen 8,000 per person and night. As compared to Austria it is difficult to find cheap rural accommodation for € 30 or Yen 4,000 a night. This could be a further barrier to staying for longer periods in rural areas.



Source: Hokudan-cho, Awaji, June 2005, own photo,

Figure 4: *Rural landscape in Hokudan-cho*

Tourism is not necessarily equally distributed either, snow based winter tourism, for example, is only important in

the North and Centre of Japan. Problems with winter tourism seem to be similar in Austria and Japan (Hatanaka 1999). In the last 50 years, we have observed a warming by 1°C. Adaptation to warming is required and many of ski resorts situated further south, e.g. in Kinki area are no longer operating as this warming has already impaired the period of use pushing the skiing industry right out of business. In other resorts, such as the skiing regions of Sapporo, there is plenty of snow even outside the major skiing season of December and March, but too distant for short trips from the major metropolitan centres of Kanto and Kansai regions.

Spa tourism is the best developed kind of rural tourism in Japan. There are 2,000 thermal hot springs, called "onsen" in Japan (Japan National Tourist Organization, 2000). They are found around the country, ranging from large resorts to small groups of inns isolated in the mountains. They are an important focal point of Japanese rural tourism and comparatively larger in number as compared to Austria. Often skiing and mountain hiking are combined with this tourism in spas.

Rural tourism cannot be found in the same density as Austria. But particular spots can be more frequented, like Mount Fuji during July and August. While farms are smaller in scale in Japan, tourist companies are larger than in Austria.

Although eco-tourism can be found in Japan and Austria, farm tourism is not very important yet in Japan. There exists no appropriate marketing as currently found in Austria. On line booking is not possible. An obstacle to using modern technology could also be the high age of farmers in Japan, while Austrian farmers are much younger, 57% are less than 55 years old and more eager to use modern technology.

A traditional hinder for rural tourism in Japan is the attitude of many locals towards strangers. In their majority they are reluctant to have strangers in their houses and villages. They prefer to stay with themselves. If other income is available, tourism is not too attractive. Additionally, the means to develop tourism cannot be found locally. Income levels in Japanese rural areas are low. Yet, small hotels and private accommodations were established by people originating from urban areas that wanted to change to rural life styles, but on higher levels than traditional farmers.

In Austria rural people learned over decades to live together with strangers and to profit from tourism. Rural life is adjusted to the exchange with people from outside. Here

the challenge is the shrinking and concentration of tourism. Less tourists result in less income and less investments. The wealthy resorts build out their facilities to stay competitive. Many small villages cannot cope with the situation and stagnate as less attractive targets.

Opportunities for Rural Tourism in Japan

The family links to rural areas are weakening and this could raise the possibility that rural tourism may become more popular in future to fulfil a general desire to see rural life and the origin of Japanese identity in these rural settings. In return, tourist yen may help to preserve rural culture and landscape that otherwise would be threatened. On the Japanese seaside there is hardly a village without destroyed houses. The pattern is similar everywhere: the old generation dies, the successor lives somewhere else and due to his/her absence, the house and property will deteriorate if no neighbour cares.

The increasing social distance between urban and rural people could be another reason for the limited development of rural tourism. This was also the case in Austria during periods of high growth but the success of tourism has changed attitudes. The exchange between urban and rural society has a longer tradition in Austria and differences between urban and rural income are less distinctive. As this exchange is not happening to the same extent in Japan the urban people's understanding of rural areas remains limited. After links with relatives are weakened or even broken, many of rural areas in Japan will have no support or understanding of their interests or ways.

Non special tourism with home stays on farms was never too important and became less interesting with increasing travel budgets. Without a beginning of non special tourism, the development of specialized tourism is much more difficult and even risky. Aside from particular regions like Nagano, there is not an endogenous development crystallizing from many smaller local regions. Instead the development is exogenous and large scale by major developers seldom originating from the region. Rural residents are not sufficiently integrated and do not identify with tourism as a new form of rural life and income.

With the exception of some designated beaches, the 33,000 km of Japanese sea shore area is underused for tourism and swimming. There are plenty of beaches, but the vision required to see a valuable tourist resource in these beaches is limited. In particular more remote beaches are neglected. In other situations, like in Awaji Island, facilities such as a sea park and beach avenue in Tsuna

were developed but not sufficiently used. The local communities did not supply the money to maintain them. The visual scenery of coastal areas is impaired almost everywhere in Japan by wave breakers made of concrete. A higher number of foreign tourists could also be a stimulating factor to manage coastal lands in a better way for tourism and get more income. A notable form of coastal rural tourism was developed by fishermen. They arrange one day fishing tours with tourists, but so far farmers or fishermen hesitate to share their house or facilities with tourists.



Source: Hokudan-cho, Awaji, June 2005, own photo,

Figure 5: *An opportunity for tourism is the coastline of Japan with 33.000km*

Tourism helps people to appreciate the cultural landscape and to mobilize public support for its maintenance. Programs for supporting rural tourism can lend substantial help to the future of rural Japan. Tourism supports rural development not only in terms of money, but can also lead to a better understanding of rural areas by urban tourists.

Another reason why rural tourism can become more interesting is the aging society. Japanese people enjoy the highest life expectancy in the world. Retired people have time to enjoy tourism but if they were not used to rural tourism during their working life, the likelihood of enjoying it after retirement is less likely. It is not everyone's dream to move to rural areas like some retired and elderly do, but to escape occasionally is a common wish, and rural areas that are nearby offer convenient solutions to satisfy this demand.

More holidays will additionally increase the demand in rural tourism in Japan. Deregulating the holiday period in different parts of Japan could moderate the problem of peak seasons. One week more vacation will also bring additional holidays.

Conclusions

The history and future of rural tourism are different in

Austria and Japan. Austria has a highly developed rural tourism which draws two thirds from abroad so that tourism is a main export product. Japan has a less developed rural tourism with a dominance of domestic tourists. Since the intensity of rural tourism is far less in Japan, there are ample possibilities to increase this form of tourism.

Efforts can be usefully made to maintain the level of rural tourism in Austria and to develop rural tourism in Japan. A key argument for the development of tourism is to keep rural land populated and landscapes manageable.

An important challenge is to offer a contrast to urban life for people of the same region. People should start to visit and to use rural areas more often. Moreover, seeing opportunities in rural life is a motive for some people to settle in rural areas later on.

Farmers in Japan are rapidly aging and one cannot expect them to easily opt for change. Rural areas need young or new people again. New citizens have to move from urban areas to rural areas. A good example is that many of small kani pensions at the Japan seaside which I visited were opened by people moving to rural areas. Mediating programs between resident population and newcomers are required in those places where an understanding for the situation is not yet established.

Acknowledge:

The author would like to thank staff and students from the Awaji Landscape Planning and Horticultural Academy. The support I received during a five month stay as a guest professor of ALPHA was great. Without their help, the level of understanding in this comparison would be more limited. A special thank to Dr. Fujio Hirata for arranging my stay in ALPHA. Many thanks to Dr. Tomohiro Ichinose for his personal care and a well organized symposium of the Kinki branch of the Japanese Rural Planning Society in August 2005. Numerous thanks Dr. Allan Kellehear, La Trobe University Melbourne, for his valuable comments on the manuscript of this paper.

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第 7 号

2006年3月



兵庫県立淡路景觀園芸学校

景観園芸研究 第7号

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