**Methods report**

**Project title:**

ESR 12 - A relational understanding of farm businesses as coupled social-ecological systems

**Principal investigator:**

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**Grant information:**

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 765389.

**Date of data collection:**

First field work: 1 March to 30 April 2019; Second field work: 15 February to 15 March 2020

**Project summary:**

Alternative farmers are exploring new practices based on different relations, beliefs and worldviews than those favoured by the agricultural mainstream. This ‘alternativeness’ brings with it a range of challenges linked to inclusion and exclusion in rural communities and to farm resilience. This research project examines whether and how art can create spaces for alternative farmers, helping them to navigate ambiguities, to reconsider traditions, and to develop innovative practices. A theoretical framework using a relational approach is used to investigate the types of relations on- and off-farm that are created or facilitated by art.

**Project details**

*Purpose of the project:*

The purpose was to (1) collect evidence on the context and relations between art and the creation and maintenance of social and mental spaces of alternative farmers; (2) explore the perspective of farmers about the impact of art and opportunities of art festivals on their farming practices and the relations with mainstream farmers; (3) develop recommendations to inform the use of art to promote diversity in farming practices and thus the potential impacts of art to farming; (4) disseminate research findings and recommendations to engage a wide audience, generate impact and contribute to the broader debates about art and farming practices.

*Research design:*

A case study approach was adopted. The case was the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (ETAF) in the Echigo-Tsumari area of the Niigata Prefecture, Japan. Interviews were conducted with 25 farmers and one artist between March and April 2019. Among these interviews, two of them were conducted in a group of two farmers but questions were asked individually to each farmer. Between February and March 2020, three focus group discussions were carried out with 17 out of 26 of the respondents. Most of the interviews and group discussions were conducted with the assistance of a Japanese-English translator, except for three interviews in which the respondents can speak fluent English or Mandarin. The individual interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes, the focus group discussions lasted for around 90 minutes each. All the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed in full in English. In February 2021, I had an online informal conversation with the interviewed artist, the notes of the conversation were upload to the database.

*Sampling method:*

The participants both ‘new-entry’ farmers (farmers who do not come from a farming family) and farm successors, they were selected based on either of three aspects: (1) farming practices that significantly differ from the dominant approach of mechanization with the use of chemical fertilizers and synthetic pesticide and herbicide; (2) engaged in an alternative social network that goes beyond the local community and Japanese Agricultural Cooperative (JA) (3) alternative labor arrangements, i.e. that include non-family members, e.g. agricultural workers who work in social enterprises and entrepreneurial farms. These three criteria can overlap. As long as a farmer fits one of them, he/she is identified as an ‘alternative farmer’ and will be included in the sample.

20 of the respondents were identified through the network of ‘Gift from Land’, an art-farming program of ETAF that the PI participated in from May to August 2018. The program allowed interactions with alternative farmers because it combines farming, education and art by practicing permaculture in local area. The rest of the five respondents were recruited through snowball sampling from these 20 respondents. The one artist was interviewed because she has been helping local farmers to market their products through artistic design, so her experiences were believed to be relevant for the research topic.

Profile of the interviewed farmers:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Age**  **(in 2019)** | **Crop(s)** | **Distinctiveness from mainstream farmers (based on criteria 1-3 mentioned above)** |
| *Farm successors* | | | |
| Ikeda (M) | 50s | Rice | 1, 2 |
| Watanabe (M) | 70s | Rice, soybeans | 1, 2 |
| Seto (M) | 50s | Rice, soybeans, wheat | 1, 2, 3 |
| Nakano (M) | 80s | Rice | 1, 2 |
| Kedo (M) | 30s | Rice, vegetables, wild vegetables | 1, 2 |
| Koji (M) | 70s | Rice, vegetables | 1, 2 |
| Yoshihiro | 30s | Rice, Kozo | 1, 2 |
| Yuji (M) | 30s | Rice, hop flowers | 1, 2 |
| *‘New entry’ farmers* | | | |
| Abe (M) | 50s | Rice | 1, 2 |
| Ikumo (F) | 30s |
| Kudo (M) | 30s |
| Kikuchi (M) | 50s |
| Nagamo (M) | 30s |
| Keiko (F) | 80s | Rice, vegetables | 1, 2 |
| Tanaka (M) | 30s | Rice | 1, 2 |
| Yanaga (M) | 30s | vegetables | 1, 2 |
| Kita (F) | 30s | Fruit | 1, 2 |
| Shibata (M) | 40s | Rice, Holy basil |
| *Farmers in community farming enterprises/non-profit organisations* | | | |
| Morita (M) | 20s | Rice, vegetables | 1, 2, 3 |
| Rika (F) | 20s | Rice, vegetables |
| Murata (F) | 20s | Rice, vegetables |
| Yokohama (M) | 50s | Rice |
| Kouta (M) | 20s | Rice, soybeans, wheat |
| Yoshida (M) | 30s | Rice, wheat |
| Shuji (M) | 30s | Rice, vegetables |

*Interview methods:*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted (refer to p.5 for the interview guide). Photo elicitation was used to enrich and complement data collected from interviews. Nine photos of seven artworks were selected to use in the interviews. The artworks were selected based on their high publicity in ETAT, conspicuous locations on the rice fields and the linkage to alternative farming in Japan. These were to make sure that the selected artworks are familiar to the respondents and make it easier for them to relate art to farming and their alternative farming mode in the interview.

The following selected artworks were printed on A5-size cards with title of the artworks:



*Focus group discussion:*

In the focus group discussions, preliminary research findings from the first field work in 2019 were shared with the participants with the supplementation of a handout in Japanese (please refer to ‘RECOMS\_ESSR12\_handout\_2020-02-27’). After that, the participants were invited to share their feedback. Finally, the participants were invited to share and discuss their thoughts on the following questions:

1. What is the landscape to you? Just the rice terraces shaped by farmers, or also the wilder part like forests, mountains?
2. Do you think that the way you look a landscape is different from a layperson/a visitor? If yes, how?
3. Many of you have said the landscape and rice terraces here are more beautiful than art pieces, what is it that you found beautiful from the landscape?

*Date analysis method:*

Data collected from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using content analysis with ATLAS.ti.

# **Interview guide**

**Interview guide – farmers**

1. When did you start farming? Why did you start farming?
2. What is specific about your farming practices?
3. What are the main challenges you experience in farming?

**The following questions are about how art might be related to farming. Please select a photo that you feel illustrates an important aspect of your farming life.**

1. Why did you select this photo? What does this piece of art mean to you?
2. Have you personally seen/experienced this art work?
   1. If not: do you know it from pictures?
3. How would you relate this artwork to the challenges you are facing?
   1. Does it strengthen your motivations to engage in different farming practices than the mainstream? How?

**ETAT is more than these artworks. It also includes traditional performance art** (other art forms to those who are artists themselves) **and a range of activities that may open opportunities for you as a farmer.**

1. Do you relate *Matsuri* to your farming practices? If yes: how?
2. How does ETAT help you in developing your preferred farming lifestyle?
   1. E.g. through organising meetings with other non-mainstream farmers?
   2. E.g. through offering marketing opportunities for the food you produce?

**Interview guide – artists who work with farmers**

1. How do you use art to cooperate with farmers? What have you done?
2. How/ why did you start cooperating with them?
3. What are the positive experiences of working with farmers? What are the challenges, if any?
4. How do you think your artist practices influence/help farmers?
5. What do you think are the other potential impacts that art can have on farmers?