

The Relationship between Conservation and Tourism: a Case Study on Historic Preservation Area in Sawara

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Abstract

This study aims to clarify, first, the relationship between a development process of conservation and tourism, second, the role and relationship between local groups which dealing with activities in historic preservation areas in Japan. The study analyses conservation and tourism in terms of politics and local activities in Sawara Preservation District for Group of Historic Buildings. The study finds that the conservation and tourism development in Sawara can be divided into four periods. In each period, the growth of conservation and tourism has supported each other in the development. This study also finds that a local residents group called “*Onogawa to Sawara no Machinami wo Kangaeru kai*”, played an important role in not only conservation planning but also tourism activities in Sawara. Through the participatory approach, the Association set out the appropriate tourism activities and recognized the benefit of tourism activities in conservation. During the recent years, the Association tried to promoting the adaptive reuse of traditional buildings through the tourism events and to cooperate with other local interest groups aiming for an effective organization for tourism management of Sawara.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

In the 1970s, the “Discover Japan” campaign was the start of national attention being paid to places with historical structures as sightseeing spots. Domestic tourism increased and currently the Japanese government’s creation of a policy for a tourism nation has encouraged domestic and international tourism in many historically important places.

Contrarily, areas with historically important townscapes have suffered from an aging society, increased vacant structures, and the loss of commercial vigor. In the face of these problems areas with historically important townscape have used those aspects as a resource to encourage tourism as a way toward revitalization.

This situation has led to a kind of reciprocal relationship between tourism and historic areas. Many residents of areas with historically important townscapes failed to see the relationship between conservation and tourism and actually saw them in conflict. An initiator for the connection between conservation and tourism and that was the creation of plans that allowed for a synergetic relationship between the two efforts. Further, the creation of a relationship between conservation and tourism required an understanding from local stakeholders.

This research takes into account the aforementioned issues from the perspectives of the administration and residents of a historical townscape with a long history and its related tourism in Chiba Prefecture in the City of Katori’s Sawara Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings. This paper aims are the following:

1. to clarify the circumstances in which Sawara’s townscape conservation and tourism systems were developed and to show the processes for each development
2. to illustrate the roles that were taken by the local players in conservation and tourism

- in Sawara's historic area
- 3. to show the players relationship to Sawara's historical areas and their conservation as well as their tourism activities

1.2 Research Methods

1. Literature review covering periods from 1970 to the present relating to Sawara's history, its townscape, its tourism and the administrative resources and plans, and records relating to local organizations.
2. Interview survey of the main players in Sawara's historic townscape and tourism activities

2 Research Objectives

2.1 Overview of Sawara

Located about 70km away from Tokyo in the northeastern part Chiba Prefecture (Figure 1), the Sawara area of the City of Katori, Sawara was its own independent city until 2006 when it was merged with Katori for administrative reasons. The Ono-Katori Area (Figure 2) that forms the heart of Sawara's historic district, was Designated as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings in 1996 by the Agency of Cultural Affairs. Reference to Sawara's Historic Area is referring to this designated area (Figure 3, 4).



Figure 1: The Location of Sawara

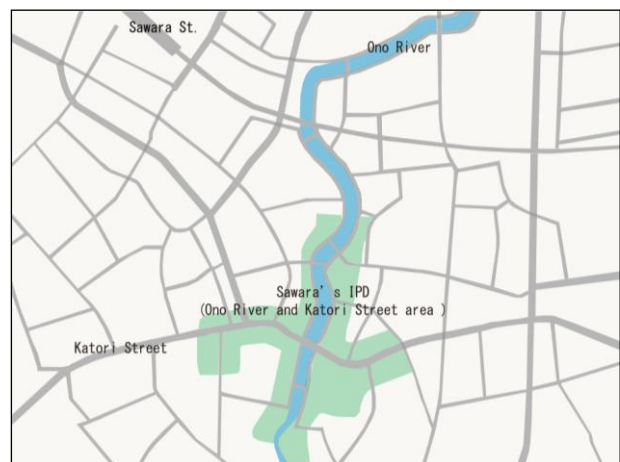


Figure 2: The Location of Sawara's Historic Area



Figure 3: Sawara's Townscape and Tourists



Figure 4: Sawara's Townscape along Ono River

2.2 Historical Background of Sawara

For around three centuries Sawara played a role in shipping and trade activities between Northern Honshu and Edo. Due to its geographical location, many ships passed through its port and along the Ono River and Katori Street many commercial and trade-related business developed and created a merchants' district (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Katori Street in 1911

When the railroad arrived in Sawara in 1898, the importance of shipping diminished and the center of town shifted from the Ono-Katori Area to that around Sawara Station. But in the 1970s, the important role of commercial area around Sawara Station began to decline due to the emergence of shopping mall resulting from nearby road-development (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Bad Condition Traditional Building along Katori Street in 1980s



Figure 7: Run-down Commercial Area around Sawara Station.

While the Agency of Cultural Affairs selected Sawara's The Ono-Katori Area for a townscape preservation exploratory survey in 1975, the administration and the residents were focused on modernizing the area and were not interested in any attempts at historic conservation. Later, the failure in promotion agriculture and industrial complex led to the realization of cultural heritage.

3 Conservation and Tourism in Sawara's Historic Area

3.1 The Beginning of the Public Discussion of Conservation and Tourism (1981-1989)

The maintenance of Sawara's historic area was first discussed in "the Modernization of the Sawara Region's Commercial Area (1981)". The plan identified The Ono-Katori Area as an appropriate place for redevelopment for tourism as a commercial area. Lacking any references to conservation of the historic area, the plan proposed the demolition of some traditional buildings to clear space for parking for visitors. Fortunately Sawara's economy was not strong enough for the project to come to fruition.

The effort to designate a preservation area, resulting from the Japan National Trust's Historic Buildings Survey, began in 1982, as Sawara administration to recognize The Ono-Katori Area's traditional buildings themselves as tourist attractions. Soliciting the townspeople's opinions and support through town meetings about the designation was initially unsuccessful in gaining local support due to lack of a real action plan for the creation of a historic preservation area. Additionally residents regarded conservation as a way to limit their freedom in the use of their property.

During this period many historical buildings were destroyed in favour of new structures by families with the economic means. These actions damaged the overall townscape which has historical importance.

3.2 Investigating conservation and tourism for the historic area 1990-1993

The Sawara's conservation movement actually began in the 1990s, as the national government at that time provided 100 million yen to municipalities for projects that would stimulate the local economy. The administration of Sawara held town meetings where public discussion about use of the money occurred between residents, administrative representatives, and specialists in revitalization participated and in these meetings piqued the interest of local residents in conserving traditional structures as a way of promoting tourism and stimulating local economy.

Since failing to create an agreement in the 1980s on the preservation area in Sawara with the support of the local residents, the administration of Sawara still maintained negative feelings in relation to the historic building conservation movement. Due to a lack of understanding between the administration and the residents, a grass-roots organization known as *Onogawa to Sawara no Machinami wo Kangaeru Kai* (OSMK) operating without the support of the administration pushed forward the creation of a historic area and the conservation of historic buildings as a way to promote tourism. The members of the organization were mostly historic area residents, but also included other local residents and specialists in historic preservation.

In order to facilitate the conservation of historic buildings, knowledge about traditional historic buildings and conservation systems was imparted to the members of OSMK through educational events led by specialists in historic preservation along with study trips to areas where conservation efforts had progressed. Using the themes of historic conservation and tourism in historic areas, participants in the events were asked to consider issues such as "what type of place would you like to make Sawara", "what type of conservation system is appropriate for Sawara", and "what is needed for the realization of tourism in a historic area" and the residents discussed, and decided these issues. The members of OSMK deepened their understanding of the conservation of historic buildings and tourism in historic areas while understanding the complexity and importance of those issues. They began with the realization that, in order to promote tourism, the maintenance of the townscape as a whole is central and

pursued the Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings (IPD). Additionally the members of OSMK began to understand their own roles in the conservation and the promotion of tourism.

The first activity for tourism for OSMK was managing the tourist information center for Sawara's historic area. In the beginning of the 1990s, OSMK members used the opportunity to introduce the history of the town and its sightseeing spots to visitors in Sawara's historic area. OSMK continues this activity to this day (Figure 8).



Figure 8: OSMK's Tourist Information Center

Further, the OSMK had to research the feasibility of an IPD designation. In the beginning of the 1990s, the condition of Sawara's historic building, due to lack of maintenance, was in a deteriorated state. Even local members of OSMK had doubts that Sawara's historic buildings would qualify for the IPD designation, so in 1992 OSMK specialists in historic preservation conducted a survey on Sawara's townscape to determine:

1. the actual condition of Sawara's traditional buildings
2. the value of the buildings in historic terms, and also as a tourist attraction
3. the appropriate conservation plan



Figure 9: Discussion of Buildings Survey

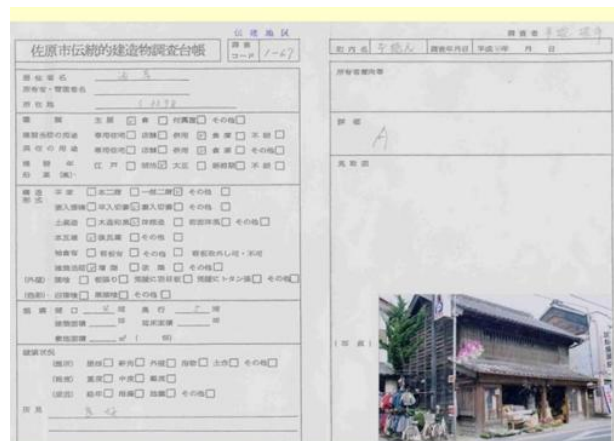


Figure 10: Buildings Survey Sheet

The members of OSMK later categorized and documented Sawara's historical buildings (Figure 9, 10). In doing this townscape survey, OSMK discovered that many structures built in Japan's Edo Period (1603-1867) and Meiji Periods (1868-1912) still exist and that The Ono-

Katori Area form the center of this concentration of historical buildings. At the same time the organization also confirmed that these buildings have value for tourism. Additionally the townscape survey also served to illustrate the depth of Sawara's regional culture and its traditional buildings for the local residents, but also provided a source of pride and served to give real meaning for the members' participation in the activities. The result of this work moved OSMK from simply being concerned with the conservation of historic buildings and tourism resources development, to a broader scope of conservation of local culture, the improvement of current dwelling environments, and ways of using historic buildings and cultural resources for community development.

Using the results from the survey on traditional buildings and townscape, OSMK was able to determine the limits of the area for the conservation of historic buildings along with the costs in conserving that section of the city and created the Historic Area Preservation Plan which was proposed to the city administration in 1992.

The proposal was the first step for OSMK in getting recognition and support from the city. OSMK then called for input from specialists in historic preservation, the commercial sector, and others to come together and discuss the subject, which led to the development of the Formative Townscape Basic Plan for Sawara in 1993, which was subsequently submitted to the city. Additionally, OSMK ensured that each household in the historic area received a copy of the plan and gathered support for it through a community meeting for the purposes of explaining the plans workings. Through these activities, OSMK managed to correct the lack of any real plan for the conservation of historic buildings in the 1980s and also correct the misunderstandings residents had at that time about a system for conservation.

3.3 The beginning of conservation and tourism in the historic area 1994-2000

After receiving the Formative Townscape Basic Plan for Sawara in 1993, the administration of Sawara officially announced the Sawara City Historic Townscape Ordinance in 1994. At the end of that year a partnership between the city administration and OSMK created the historic buildings conservation subsidy program in order to provide each of the historic buildings with the basic tools for maintenance and to create a conservation enforcement program.

After the 1993 Formative Townscape Basic Plan for Sawara, the partnership between the city administration and OSMK allowed for the education of the local residents through scores of public meetings where representatives appealed to the importance of conserving the townscape and helped residents understand the efforts (Figure 11). Through this partnership between OSMK and the city administration and through the consensus building that came with their activities, 92% of the residents were in support of the conservation plan by 1995. The following year the Agency of Cultural Affairs selected The Ono-Katori Area for IPD designation which along with the conservation of historic buildings and the city's townscape improvement only added to the liveliness and activity in the town.

Although the move towards conservation had begun through an understanding and implementation of the maintenance of the structures, the surfacing of other issues such as a lack of heirs, houses with closed shop fronts, and other non-structural problems left many local residents with a negative attitude towards the conservation efforts. In response to these issues, city employees and OSMK once again cooperated to help explain the importance of conservation as well as the city's subsidy and community development programs through educational activities. The result of these activities was the designation of 10 buildings for the yearly subsidy program with, currently, 130 buildings receiving maintenance.

Since the townscape conservation program began, the number of visitors has gradually been on the increase. In order to cope with this increase, OSMK has responded to residents' calls and started the Sawara Historic Area Tour Guide Volunteer Club. Members of the club act as volunteer guides for visitors to Sawara's historic district and also introduce local culture and history as a way to impart on visitors the same appreciation for the importance of conservation and history that underlie their organization's efforts (Figure 12).



Figure 11: Education Activities for Encourage Understanding in Conservation



Figure 12: Sawara Historic Area Guide Volunteer

Within the Formative Townscape Basic Plan for Sawara, OSMK included ways to use the historic area for tourism and the city's conservation plan emphasized the importance of tourism in the historic area as a means of conservation. Beginning with the Commercial and Tourism Vision for Sawara plans of 1993 and Tourism Promotion Vision for Sawara plans of 1994 and extended to the New Tourism Promotion Action Plan for Sawara, local revitalization for the historic area came to be of central importance in the city's tourism program. While many plans were laid out in the plan such as boat tours, ways of promoting shops for tourists, cultural tourism facilities, the only successful proposition was the creation of a local museum since so much cooperation was needed to allow for the city's Visitors' Program. Additionally, since local residents and those in the commercial sector were not fully able to cope with the increasing numbers of tourists, the vision for Sawara's promotion of tourism was limited.

3.4 The Evolution of Conservation and Tourism in the Historic Area 2001-present

Despite their limited concrete successes, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Sawara city administration did come to believe the development of the townscape conservation for the purposes of tourism as a central factor in the town's revitalization efforts and during this time administrators, with the cooperation of local residents, created a Tourism Action Plan.

In the Downtown Revitalization Basic Plan of 2001 The Ono-Katori Area was identified as central to tourism and set for revitalization. Subsequent plans addressed the many previous issues such as the use of traditional buildings, the boat tours, leading projects, and tourism in historic areas including the 2002 Business Strategy for Sawara (Town Management Organization Framework), the 2003 Slow City – Relaxed Town Sawara Plan using commerce and enterprise.

In the 2002 Business Strategy for Sawara (Town Management Organization Framework) plan-making process working groups including a variety of local actors, and community groups pressed forward their agenda through public forums in order to clarify the roles of each

different local actor in the promotion of tourism in the historic district. This led to the creation of a Local Development Corporation, which would promote tourism, but also would require the participation of local residents. Using this corporation structure as the structure for the actualization of tourism in Sawara, a joint public-private venture called Bure Kimera Corporation was formed to serve these purposes. Additionally, the administration called on the public to participate in the subsidies and to participate in the promotion of tourism as the Sawara Okami-san Club and the International Exchange Club, the likes of which promote tourism in Sawara's historic area (Figure 13, 14).



Figure 13: Ono River Boat Tour by Bure Kimera



Figure 14: Ono River Light Up by Okami-san Club

Adding, then, to the efforts of OSMK for the conservation of historic buildings and tourism for Sawara's historic area, local participants in historic area conservation and tourism promotion efforts increased along with visitors to the area and, since 2000, there has been a gradual growth fulfilling the earlier overall vision.

As visitor numbers increased to the area, buildings that had been disused were transformed by proper maintenance and shops began to return. However, just outside this area other historic buildings continue to be vacant and in disrepair (Figure 15). Since the area had made no progress, the local authorities and OSMK promoted the development of tourist events in these areas as well. For example, in an attempt to heighten the awareness of historic structures a yearly event starting in 2006 has taken place in November of each year opening traditional buildings to the public (Figure 16). Another such public event is the Sawara Antique Market, which be held for attracting visitors to the vacant shops.

While it is clear that the activities of OSMK do attract tourists and that they facilitate relationships between the tourists and local residents, the level of these events and their connection to historic buildings is less clear. For one, the vacant shops used for many of the events are places that are in disrepair or no longer used for commerce due to an elderly owner's inability to continue working or due to the lack of a successor to inherit a property and not necessarily due to lack of business. Therefore, regardless of the increase in vitality and activity in the region, it is unclear if encouraging the owners of historic buildings that are ill-used would even be possible. For the purposes of conservation of historic buildings in Sawara's historic area, using vacant and disused buildings for redevelopment as a way of preserving the area, and creating a charming historic area for tourism, further development is required.



Figure 15: Vacant Shop



Figure 16: Traditional Buildings Public Opening

4 Relationships between Players of Conservation and Tourism in Sawara

It is possible to divide the major players into three groups: the administration, local for-profit groups, and local resident organizations. Additionally, their activities can also be divided into three groups: the conservation of historic buildings and spaces, the management of visitors, and the promotion of tourism (Figure 17).

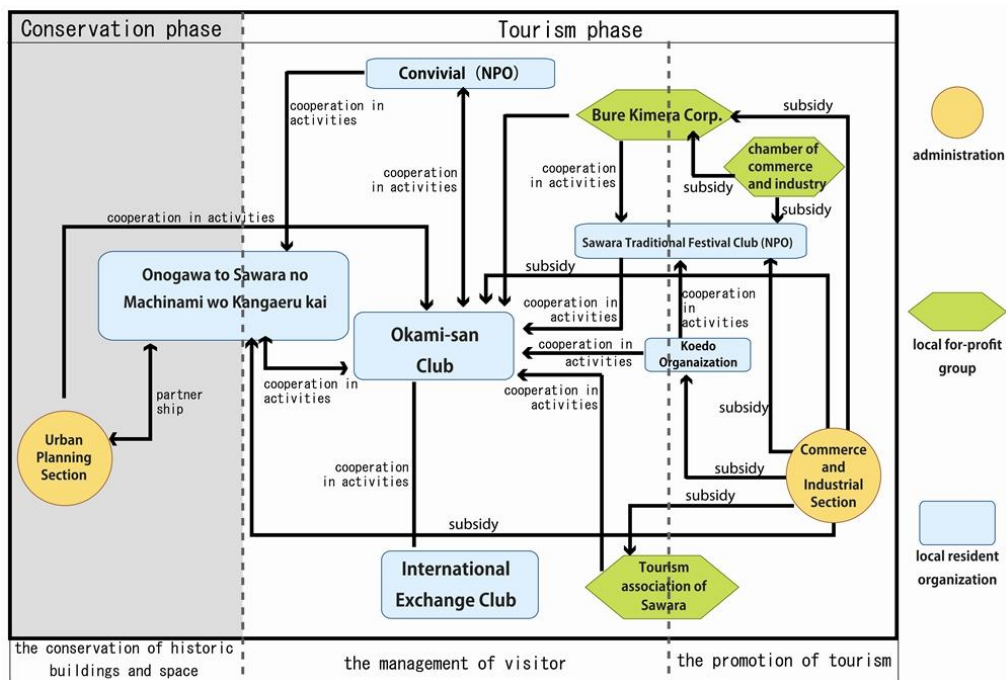


Figure 17: Relationships between Players in Sawara Historic Area

The image (Figure 17) illustrates the relationship between the main constituents in Sawara's historic area. Each participating party provides cooperation through monetary support or enterprise activities to another. While there is some form of relationship between all parties in the term of tourism, when considering conservation activities, the city administration (Urban Planning Section) and OSMK have no relationship with any other entities. Currently there is no

visible confrontation between entities concerned with the townscape conservation and tourist promotion which allows a level of sustainability to each activity. However, as stated in Chapter Three, there are limits to the uses of Sawara's traditional buildings. In order to shed some light on this issue, OSMK has, since 2006, invited the concerned parties to discuss the direction of regional planning issues every year. At this point, the event has yet to address the issues of regional management, but OSMK intends to conduct a more complete connection between conservation and tourism in the future.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Relationships between Conservation and Tourism in a Historic Area

It is possible to see the relation between conservation and tourism in the development of Sawara in terms of the Survey Process, the Planning Process, and the Actualization Process (Figure 18).

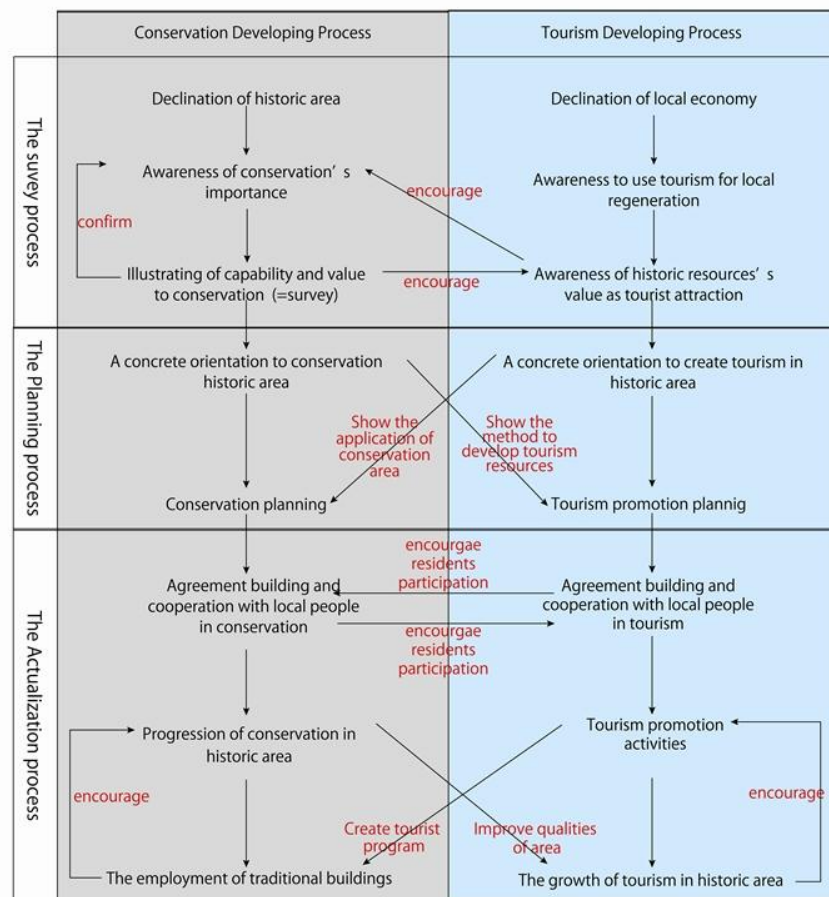


Figure 18: Relationships between conservation and tourism

The survey process originally aimed at establishing the value of the historical components of the city in terms of tourist appeal and to heighten the awareness of the conservation of historic structures. Indeed, while illustrating the importance of conservation, it also exposed the importance of the historic area as a resource for tourism.

In the planning process the purpose of conservation in relation to tourism becomes evident and the two merge together to become the grounds for the program itself. As the conservation of

historic places takes concrete shape, the historic area as a resource for tourism becomes the foundation on which that conservation effort can stand. In this process the conservation of buildings becomes the method which allows for tourism promotion.

In the actualization process, the local residents become involved in efforts for both tourism and historic building conservation. Since the economic effects are felt by residents, the motivation for participating in conservation efforts is very clear. As the town becomes beautiful and popular, residents also take pride in showing visitors their town and, in particular, the historical areas that are the draw for visitors. Additionally, as the conservation of historic buildings progresses, the historic region operating as a tourist spot becomes more and more charming and gradually grows into a place for sightseeing. With the development of a tourist program connected to the conservation of buildings, the result is that the conservation of historic buildings becomes part of the local business and activities.

5.2 OMSK's Activities

OMSK contributed to Sawara's historic building conservation and tourism efforts through showing the mutually beneficial connection between the two and by creating a balance between them by involving the local people and other actors with a vested interest in the success of the project which allows for a sustainable aspect through inclusion.

Through these activities OMSK was able to push forward the townscape conservation activities along with tourism promotion activities which allowed for the broad understanding of the importance of conservation and tourism for the town, illustrated the roles and responsibilities of the local residents in conservation and tourism while having a great impact on their own self-awareness of the issues. Through these efforts OMSK was able to successfully connect community participation to both historic conservation and tourism.

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