

Heritage, Landscape and Social Cohesion Structures in Tadami Biosphere Reserve: the Tonari Gumi System

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Keywords: Community Resilience, Social Cohesion, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Climate Change Adaptation

Abstract Tadami is a municipality in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture, consisting of 27 settlements in a mountainous valley. This study explores the cultural expressions of social cohesion identified in Tadami, and their contribution to community resilience to natural hazards, and in response to climate change and rural outmigration-related challenges.

Using anthropological methods, the research found that disaster management in Tadami relies on three interdependent approaches: self-help (jijyo), mutual help (kyoujo), and governmental aid (koujo), with tonari gumi playing a key role in mutual support and disaster preparedness. The tonari gumi system is a neighborhood-based mutual assistance network, recognized by local residents as having a key role towards disaster risk reduction.

The study has however also revealed existing challenges posed by rural outmigration and aging population, threatening the continuity of the tonari gumi system. These changes impact social cohesion-based disaster preparedness, increasing vulnerabilities to natural hazards and climate change. Findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how social cohesion and cultural heritage influence disaster risk reduction strategies, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners involved in community resilience and disaster management.